Chapter 7

WOMEN SCHOLARS OF MEDIEVAL MITHILĀ

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Tirahut's[1] or Mithilā's love for scholarship has been well-known since the days of Janaka. It was in the court of Janaka that the learned philosophical discussions took place and some important intellectual giants of the age were Uddalaka Āruṇi, Gārgī Vācaknavī, Maitreyī etc.[2] The tradition of scholarship seems to continue unabated till we come to our period. The continued and uninterrupted rule of the Karnatas (1097 - 1325 A.D.) and the Oinavāras (1325 A.D. - 1527 A.D.) has left an indelible mark on the educational life of Mithilā. The days of Vidyapati (1340-1448 A.D.) were the days of glory of the scholarly tradition in Mithilā. The rulers of the Khandavata dynasty(1556 A.D. onwards) also continued the so-called golden age of learning in this line and generously patronized learning and art in their star-studded courts. According to Abul Fazl, Tirahut (Mithilā) has been from the time immemorial a centre of Hindu learning.[4] D.C. Sen says that the light of learning came to Bengal from Mithilā and O'Malley is perfectly right when he says, "The history of Mithilā centres round the court engrossed in luxurious enjoyment of literature and learning"[5] Thus Mithilā made remarkable contribution in the field of scholarship in medieval period.

The education of women is not a new thing in Mithilā; we have a brilliant tradition of educated women. Gārgī, Maitreyī, Sulabha, Vedavatī, Shalyā, Mallinātha, Ambapālī, Jayanti, Bhārtī etc. are some of the most illustrious names in this repect. Education of women on a mass scale in Mithilā was practically unknown. It was generally confined to the women of the royal and aristocratic families, and to some extent to the middle class of the society. But the education of women belonging to the poor and the lower classes was ignored, as the latter were pre-occupied with earning their living. Hence, they got little opportunity for receiving intellectual training. We do not come across any female school in the medieval period of Mithilā. A learned father might have given instruction to his daughter. But since girls were married at a very yound age it was not possible for their fathers to give them sufficient education. Naturally this task must have fallen on their educated husbands. There are instances in which learned Panditas had equally learned wives. The aim of education was the acquisition of knowledge and formation of character. The medium of

education was Sanskrit and after primary initiation the students were taught *Amarakosa.*

The curriculam was purely traditional and after the completion of general education, students took to specialised study. Writing of books was an important profession. Tántra philosophy was widely practised by women in Mithilā under the Karṇāṭa dynasty. Narasimha Thakura has enumerated various types of women in his Tantric work entitled *Tarabhaktisu-dharnarva,* required for the purpose, viz., Natis (actress), Kapālikas (nuns wearing necklace of skulls), Veśyā (Prostitutes), Dhobinas (washer women), Nāpitā (barber), Brahmani, Śudra, Govara, Malini (gardener) etc.[6] The education of 64 Kalās and paintings were necessary for the women.[7] Literature, Poetics, Science, Logic Mīmāṁsā, Erotics, Folk-arts, Fine-arts, Embroidery, History, Grammar Chhanda (rhetoric), Nyaya, Āyurveda and Astronomy were studied along with a specialised study of the Smriti and Dharmaśāstra. In those days there was practically no system of regular examination like today. The teacher was the real judge of pupils in the different spheres of his life. Debates and discussions in the society of the learned persons were common in those days. Such discussions have an old tradition in Mithilā. Gārgī,Maitreyī and Sulabhā pārticipated in such learned discussions in the court of Janaka and the discussion held between Sarikara and Bharati has became a legend in Mithilā. Mithilā instituted a peculiar examination for graduation and completion in studies. It was known as Salaka-Pariksa. At such an examination a candidate was required to examine a manuscript very minutely and then a needle was passed through the whole book.[8] Then the candidate has to explain that page of a manuscript which was pierced last by the needle run through in. The experts took his viva-voce. The teacher-pupil relation was very cordial. Students were very particular about keeping their teachers satisfied both by their conduct and personal services. The position of teacher was respectable in the society. The rich women patronized their teachers and the teachers praised the patrons in their immortal works.

Lakhimā

However, we notice some of the women scholars of medi-

eval Mithilā who played important part in raising the status of Mithilā in the realm of education and learning. The most important among them seems Lakhimā, the chief queen of Shiva Sinha. She was a daughter of Jivadhara.[9] She ascended the throne after the tragic end of her husband. Local traditions assert that Lakhimā ruled for a period of 12 years (1416-1428 A.D.). She was a celebrated scholar of the period. Her verses in Sanskrit, of which stray pieces are still extant, are greatly honoured by the scholars of Mithilā. She was a proficient *Viduṣī* in the poetic literature.[10] Numerous legends speaking eloquently of her poetic talent and unsurpassing wit and humour are yet a matter of keen interest in Maithila families.[11] Along with her husband she was a patron of Vidyapati. The various poems of Vidyapati are attributed to Lakhimā.

Viśvāsadevī

Viśvāsadevī, the most beloved queen of Padma Simha, was yet another celebrated women scholar of Medieval Mithilā. She ascended the throne after the death of her husband[13] (1430 A.D.). Viśvāsadevī reigned for twelve years.[14] She was a well-known scholar of law.[15] Vidyapati wrote his *Śaivasarvasvasāra* under the orders of Viśvāsadevī.[16] The text is attributed to her. She contributed in raising the status of the philosophical standard of Mithilā.[17] Though it seems that like Lakhimā she was not a great poet or scholar but she was undoubtedly a great patron of Sanskrit learning. If tradition is to be relied upon during the reign of Viśvāsadevī, there was a gathering of about fourteen hundred Mimamsakaras in Mithilā .[18] Under her kind patronage Vidyapati wrote also the *Gaṅgā-Vākyāvali* and *Pramāṇabhūta-Purāṇasangraha*. These texts are replete with the praise of the queen.

Dhīramati

Dhīramati, the queen of Narasimha of the Oinavara dynasty, was an another celebrated woman scholar of Mithilā. After the death of her husband (1460 A.D.) she ascended[19] the throne of Mithilā. She was a well-known lady scholar, and the patron of many scholars. Vidyapati wrote his *Dānavākyāvalī* under the orders of Dhīramati.[20] A manuscript of this work dated 1539 Samvat (1482 A.D.) is reported in Bhandarakr's report for the year 1883-

4, p.352. Raghunandana in his *Vivahatattva* has extensively quoted from this work.[21]

Chandrakalā

Chandrakala, the daughter-in-law of Vidyāpati, was also believed to be an accomplished woman of Medieval Mithilā. She was well-versed in Sanskrit and Mathila poetics. Lochanakavi in his *Rāgataragini*[22] quotes a poem by her. The poem has been cited as an illustration of *Prīkarir Rāginī*. Few lines are given below:-

श्यामा सवन्दिते अति समय गीत सुशोभते।

आत्मदान समान सुन्दरि धारवर्षति सिञ्चये।

सिञ्चह सुन्दरि मम हृदयम, अधर सुधा मधुपान मियम्।

चन्द्रकवि जयदेव मुद्रित मानतेज तोहे राधिके।।

वचन ममधर कृष्ण अनुस किन्तु कामकला शुभे।।104

चन्द्रकला हे वचन करसी, मानिनी माधव अनुसरसी।

'Chandrakala illustrates *Prīkarirāginī* in the extant poem. Bilingualism was a common feature in literary compositions in medieval Mithilā. The identification of Chandrakala has been questioned by K. N. Jha 'Kirana' who has discovered a number of unknown poems of Vidyapati and his contemporaries. According to him she was the wife of Chandrakavi Jayadeva and not the daughter-in-law of Vidyapati.'

Jayā

Jayā or Jayātmā was a queen of Bhairava Sinha, king of Mithilā. She was also a celebrated lady scholar. The Sanskrit learning was patronized by her. She was mother of Rājādhirāja Purusottamadeva, and at her instance, Vachaspati wrote the *Dvaitanirṇaya,* on the doubtful points of Smriti.[23]

Lakhimādevi or Lachmiā Mahādevī

Lakhimādevi or Lachima Mahadevi was the wife of Chandra Simha. Bhairava Simha or Bhairavendra, king of Mithilā, had a younger brother by name Chandra Simha, who is named in Vidyāpati's *Durgābhaktī-tarangini* and Misru Miśraś Vivada--Chandra. Misarū Misra wrote his *Vivāda-Chandra*[24] and *Padārtha-Chandra*[25] under the orders of Lakhimādevi. He dedicated his works

to her. According to S.N.Singh, he can be safely placed about the middle of the 15th Century A.D.[26] While Jolly says, the period of Lachimadevi was 14th century.[27] But according to Upendra Thakur, Bhairava Simha ruled for about 35 years and he may be placed about the last half of 15th century and the first quarter of the 16th century. Lakhimādevi was a great woman scholar of Mithilā. According to Jolly, queen Lachimadevi of Mithilā composed the *Vivada-Chandra,* the quotations of which from the named later authorities are as follows:[29]:-

Parijata(1)	Ratn-ākara-kṛta(1)
Balarupa(1)	Vyavahāra-tilaka(1)
Bhavadeva(2)	(Smṛti-Maharṇava) Prakāśa(1)
Ratnākara (10)	Smriti-sāra(7)

But this logic is unbelievable. As above-mentioned, many scholars have accepted that the Guru of Lachimadevi, Misarti Misra, wrote the *Vivada-Chandra* and she patronized him.

Lakhimā Thakurāina

One of the few learned women of India whose names has come down to us, was Lakhimā Thakkuraina who lived in the middle of the 15th century A.D.[30] She was a well-known poetess of Mithilā.. Numerous stories are told of her leaning and wisdom. Grierson has brought some poems of Lakhimā Thakurāina to light. When her daughter was of age to be sent to her husband, she wrote the following letter to her son-in-law (jāmātā):

आक्रान्ता दशमध्वजाति नात्या मूर्छिता निर्जले
तुर्य द्वादशवद्द्विवतीय मतिमन्ने कादशा भस्तिनी।
सा पष्ठी नृपपपञ्चमस्य नवमभू सप्तमीवर्जिता
प्राप्नोत्यष्ट मवेदना परिहेत्रूर्ण तृतीयोभ्दवः।।

'Attacked with the severe onslaught of the God of Love is she. Distraught like a crab or a fish in a dry place is she. O thou bull-minded one, the damsel, round-formed as a water jar, with arched eyebrows, (the destimed wife) of thou who art like a lion amongst kings; and who is not (gross) like (a shopkeeper's wife who plies) the scales. She feels pain-like that of a scorpion bite.

Quickly let the result of married life relieve her'. Mr. Grierson suspects, the text is certainly corrupt.[31] According to S.M. Natesa Shastri,[32] the same verse is repeated in South India also; though no one knows here that Lakhimā Thakurāina is the author of it. The correct form of the verse, as current in South India, is -

संतप्ता दशमधवजस्य गतिना संमूर्च्छिता निर्जले
सुर्य द्वादशवद्द्वितीय मतिमन्नेकादशाभस्तनी।
सा षष्ठी कति पंचमी च नवमभ्रूडसप्तमी वर्जिता
प्राप्नोत्यष्टमवेनां त्वमधुना तूर्णं तृतीयो भव।।

In accordance with Lakhimā Thākurāina's letter the son-in-law came, and after the usual ceremonies went with his wife into the bridal room. As however, she was very young and tender he abstained from exercising his marital rights. The bride told her mother, who remonstrated with her son-in-law as follows:-

तन्वी बाला कृशतनुरियां त्यज्यतामत्र शड्का
काचिद्दृष्ता भ्रमरभरतो मुञ्जरी भज्यमानां
तस्मोदेषा रहसि भवने निर्दयं पीडनीया
मनदाक्रान्तं बहुतरसं नो ददातीक्षुदण्डः।।

"Be not afraid that the damsel is too slender. Has a flower-stalk ever been seen to be broken by the weight of a bee? Therefore, in private must she be passionately given pangs. A piece of sugar-cane (when pressed) gives us gently much sweetness!

The son-in-law followed her advice and next morning the following conversation took place between the mother and the daughter:-

Daughter - मातः केलिगृहं न यामि शयनें (O Mother, I will not retire again to the bridal room)

Lakhimā कस्माच्च चन्द्रानने (Why not, my moon-faced one?)

Daughter- जामाता तव निर्दयो निजभुजे बुद्धोऽपिमां पीडनं ददाति।।

अड्गरव्रणतां च नवैर्दन्तैश्च खण्डीकृता
केनेयं रति राक्षसेन रमिता शार्दूलविक्रीडिता।।

'Your son-in-law passionately gives me pangs, even when bound in my arms, he burns me as it were with live coals, and I am torn to pieces with his nails and teeth, of what love demon am I the sport, and why does he play with me like a tiger'? In the two last sets of verses Mandakrantan and Sardulavikridita are puns on the names of the meters.[35]

Her other verses are-

उडुराजमुखी मृगराजकटी
गजराज विराजित मंदगतिः।
वनिता यदि सा हृदये वसति
क्व जपः क्व तपः समाधि विधिः।।

'If a lady, whose face resembles the moon, whose loins resemble the lion's and whose slow gait is illustrated by that of a kingly elephant, if such a lady lives in one's heart why should a man perform prayers and penances, and why the still more painful task of rigid contemplations?[36]

The following lines of Lakhimā are well-known in Mithilā, and depicts the pangs of parting. Mr. Grierson says, the meter is not very correct:-

यदि यास्यति नाथ निश्चितं
यामि यामि वचनं हि मा वद।
अशनेः पतनं न वेदनं
पतनज्ञानमतीव दुःसहम्।।

If thou must go, my Lord, say not, " I go". The falling of a thunderbolt on one causeth not the pang; it is the knowledge that it is falling which is unbearable:

The verses on the pangs of separation are as mentioned below:-

भङ्त्व भोक्तुं न भुङ्कते कुटिल विषलतां कोटिमिन्दोर्वितर्कात्तारा
कारात्तृषात्रः पिबति न पयसां विप्लुषः पत्र संस्थाः।
छाया नम्मो रूहाणामलिकुल शवलां वीक्ष्य सन्ध्याम सन्ध्यां
कान्ताविश्लेष भीरूर्दिनमपि रजनीं मन्यते चक्रवाकः।।

'He breaks the crisp lotus tendrils to eat them but does not do so, for he mistakes them for the rays of the moon; though athirst he does not drink the drops of water in the lotus leaves for he thinks them stars; in the shade of the lotus-flowers dark with the swarms of bees he sees night when there is no night; always dreading separation from his beloved, the Chakravaka imagines even the day to be night'.[37]

Once a Oandita came to try Lakhimā Thakurāina's learning. She heard this and disguising herself as a water-girl, went to meet him. The Pandita addressed her as follows:-

किं मा हि पश्यसि घटेन कटिस्थितेन

वक्रेण चारू परिमीलित लोचनेन।

अन्यं हि पश्य पुरूषं तव कार्य योग्यं

नाहं घटाङ्कितकटीं प्रमदां स्पृशामि।।

'Why are you gazing at me, pitcher on hips, with languid eyes? Gaze on some other man suited for you. I touch not a fair one whose hip is marked with the pitcher.'

To this piece of impertinence she replied:-

सत्यं ब्रवीमि मकरध्वजबाण मुग्धा

नाहं त्वदर्थमनसा परिचितन्तयामि।

दासोऽिह में विघटितस्तव तुल्यरूप:

स त्वं भवेन्नहि भवेदिति मे वितर्क:।।

'I faith, I tell thee, who art smitten by the arrow of love, that I am not so minded towards thee. I could not find my slave. You are like him, and I was merely trying to find out if you were he or not?'

Then the Pandita saw that she was Lakhimā, and admitted himself conquered.

Lakhimā observes on Bikaua (the "vendors" who married sometimes as many as forty to fifty wives):-

चपलं तुरगं परिणर्तयत:

पथि पौरजनान्परिमर्दयत:

नहि ते भुजभाग्य भवेविभवो
भगिनी भगभाग्यभवो विभवः॥

'You may make your spirited horses prance, and with them trample on the town-folk. But we all know that your wealth is not got by your own exertions but by the sale of your sister's person.[38]

Thus, the Oinavara dynasty no doubt produced celebrated women scholars like Lakhimā, Dhiramati, Viśvāsadevī, Lakhimā Thakurāina, Chandrakala etc. but the following periods proved quite dismal. The condition of women in general became worse. Daughters could easily be sold away by their parents for a few coins. Education to them began to be regarded by the society as a thing of mock and contempt. The early marriage, the *purdah* system and the economic problems were important features which obstructed the educational progress of women.

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पत्युः सिंहासनस्था पृथुमिथिल महीमण्डल पालयन्तीं
श्रीमद् विश्वासदेवी जगति विजयते चर्ययाऽरून्धतीव॥

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16. *Ibid*, 12; विज्ञानुज्ञाप्य विपति तिनमसौ विश्वविख्यात कीर्तिः।
श्रीमद् विश्वासदेवी विरचयति शिवं शैवसर्वस्वसारम्
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श्री मद्धीरमतिः प्रिया विजयते भूमण्डलाऽलङ्कृतिः।।
20. *Ibid.*, 6: लक्ष्मीभाजः कृतार्थनकृत सुमनसो या महादान
हेम ग्रामै राजीव राजी बहल तरपरागादारागैस्तडागैः।
विज्ञाऽनुज्ञाव्य विद्यापति मति कृतिनं सप्रमाणमुदारा
राज्ञी पुण्यावलोका विरचयाति नयां दानवाक्यावलीं सा।।
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विष्णोर्व्यक पुरमिव शाम्भोखि देहवामर्द्ध।
देवी सानभिरषा जयति जयात्मा महादेवी।।
श्री भैरवेन्द्र धरणीपति धर्म पत्नी राजधिराज पुरूषोत्तम देवमाता।
वाचस्पति निखिल मन्वमिदं नियुज्य द्वैते विनिर्णयविधिं विधिरूत्तनोति।।
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